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# The Hand of God in American History

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A Study of Divine Providence as Seen  
in the Life and Mission of  
a Nation

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By **WILBUR FISK TILLET**, D.D., LL.D.

Professor of Christian Doctrine in the School of Religion, and Dean  
Emeritus of the Theological Faculty in  
Vanderbilt University

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Dean Emeritus of the Theological Faculty  
in Vanderbilt University

**W**AS RALPH WALDO EMERSON  
justified in calling America "the last  
and noblest effort of Divine Providence in  
behalf of the human race"?

In what way has the history of the  
United States exemplified the Divine Law?

What deeds can America appeal to in  
proof of the truth of her claim that she  
had a providential origin, a providential  
history, and a providential mission in the  
world?

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*Board, 35 cents; paper, 25 cents*

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A benevolent layman of Virginia, impressed with the  
great value of this study of American history, has pre-  
sented a copy of it to every member of the House of  
Representatives and of the United States Senate.

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# THE HAND OF GOD IN AMERICAN HISTORY.

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A STUDY OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE AS SEEN IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF A NATION.

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“THE last and noblest effort of Divine Providence in behalf of the human race” is what Ralph Waldo Emerson calls the United States of America. The word “America” has come to be used throughout the world as a designation of this one large and influential republic of the North American Continent; and if we so use it, it is simply in compliance with accepted usage and widespread custom, and not because we fail to recognize the importance and greatness of other countries and nations in North and South America.

## I. GOD'S USE OF NATIONS.

If God does his work in this world through men, as indeed he ever does, he needs men collectively as well as individually for the accomplishment of his purposes. If human governments and nations are, as indeed they are, a necessity in the world, they are a necessity to God as well as to men. Has anything short of Divine Omnipotence such power for good as a holy nation whose government is founded upon the principles of righteousness, and which is conducted so as to promote intelligence and righteousness among its own people and throughout the earth? To answer these questions, as they must be answered, affirmatively, means that nations no less than individuals, even more than individuals, are instruments of Divine Providence. Never before in the history of the world have the power and influence of nations, alike for evil and for good, been so manifest as they are to-day; and never before has there been a time more fitting than the present, for the profitable study of the providential mission of a nation. If men will do, when collectively organized into

corporations and governments, what they will not do as individuals, and this we know to be true, it is of the highest importance that along with national consciousness there should be developed a national conscience. In studying God's providential government of nations and his relations to civil governments, we must never lose sight of the fact that governments and nations are not impersonal things and passive puppets in the Hand of Omnipotence, but free human beings collected in groups and organized in masses, and that God's providential government of them is subject to all the conditions and limitations involved in his government of individuals as free beings.

Among the eminent philosophers of the world who have believed in Divine Providence, none was more pronounced and outspoken in expressing his convictions than Hegel. He regarded "history as a spacious book of Providence recording how the deeds of men and nations have helped or hindered the purposes of God." He believed that the providence of God was exercised on a "large and grand scale," and protested against that "peddling view of Providence" which sees the Hand of God in the comparatively unimportant and trifling details of individual life, but not in the large and great affairs of nations and of the universe. His "Philosophy of History" is one long protest against the position, on the one hand, of those who limit the guiding Hand of God to the life and needs of individuals (for example, when help has unexpectedly come to an individual in great perplexity), and on the other hand, of those who believe in Divine Providence only in general, but not in the particulars and details that are involved in the processes of life alike of individuals and of nations. When the lives of individuals and the histories of nations are thus viewed, they become not only a record of human annals, but a study of Divine Providence in things both small and great.

We desire to point out some providential facts and circumstances in the history of America, drawn, not to any considerable extent from its religious and ecclesiastical history, but mainly from its civic life and what it is common to call secular history, finding perchance something sacred in the secular and much that is divine in what is most human.



## II. CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS THE CHRIST-BEARER.

Among the many facts and circumstances that prove that this nation had its inspiration and origin in the hearts and consciences of those who believed in Divine Providence and in Christ as the rightful Ruler of men and nations, we call attention first to its discovery in 1492.

Christopher Columbus regarded himself as engaged in a distinctly Christian mission, when, after committing himself and his company in prayer to the guidance of God, he went forth to discover whatever unknown worlds might lie between Spain and the East Indies. "Christopher," his baptismal name, means the "Christ-bearer," and he ever regarded himself as being, by his very christening, "the called of God." He regarded his voyage of discovery as a kind of missionary journey. "God made me," he says, "a messenger of the new heavens and the new earth." And when this New World was discovered, he lost no time in claiming it for Christ. Erecting a cross on landing, he christened the new world "San Salvador" (St. Saviour), joined with his companions in singing the "Gloria in Excelsis," and began at once proclaiming Christ to the new and strange people whom he found here.

Joaquin Miller, the American poet, although approaching and interpreting the mind and mission of Columbus from a different angle, makes him thereby no less an instrument of Divine Providence than do they who call attention to the religious faith and motives that characterized him. Miller's poem titled "Columbus" is in every way worthy of his theme, and of quotation in this study of the providential events and lessons in American history:

Behind him lay the gray Azores,  
 Behind the gates of Hercules;  
 Before him not the ghost of shores,  
 Before him only shoreless seas.  
 The good mate said: "Now must we pray,  
 For lo! the very stars are gone.  
 Brave Admiral, speak, what shall I say?"  
 "Why, say: 'Sail on! sail on! and on!'"

"My men grow mutinous, day by day,  
 My men grow ghastly wan and weak."  
 The stout mate thought of home; a spray  
 Of salt wave washed his swarthy cheek.  
 "What shall I say, brave Admiral, say,  
 If we sight naught but seas at dawn?"  
 "Why, you shall say at break of day,  
 'Sail on! sail on! sail on! and on!'"

They sailed and sailed, as winds might blow,  
 Until at last the blanched mate said:  
 "Why, now not even God would know  
 Should I and all my men fall dead;  
 These very winds forget their way,  
 For God from these dread seas is gone.  
 Now speak, brave Admiral, speak and say"—  
 He said: "Sail on! sail on! and on!"

They sailed. They sailed. Then spake the mate:  
 "This mad sea shows his teeth to-night.  
 He curls his lip, he lies in wait,  
 With lifted teeth, as if to bite!  
 Brave Admiral, say but one good word:  
 What shall we do when hope is gone?"  
 The words leapt like a leaping sword:  
 "Sail on! sail on! sail on! and on!"

Then, pale and worn, he kept his deck,  
 And peered through darkness. Ah, that night  
 Of all dark nights! And then a speck—  
 A light! a light! a light! a light!  
 It grew, a starlit flag unfurled!  
 It grew to be Time's burst of dawn.  
 He gained a world; he gave that world  
 Its grandest lesson: "On! sail on!"\*

### III. THE FAITH OF OUR FATHERS.

We think that facts can be adduced to prove that no great nation in the history of the world has ever been founded under conditions and influences so distinctly moral and religious, and by persons so thoroughly Christian in their ideals, motives, and aims, as we may with confidence claim is true of America. Bishop Galloway has truly said, in his volume entitled "Christianity and the Nation":

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The deepest and mightiest thing in any nation's heart is its religion; therefore as is the religion, so is the nation. I hesitate not to affirm that the temple at Jerusalem was built by a no more sacred patriotism or under the benedictions of a no more favoring Providence than were the colonial governments of this new world. Christian teachings were the seed thoughts of our political constitutions.

The years that intervened between the departure of Columbus from these shores and the Declaration of Independence in 1776 were years of providential preparation in which were laid, in the peoples that came hither, and in the ideals and motives that actuated them, the foundations of a nation that may be justified in claiming to be an "elect nation of God" if it shall prove itself such, not by self-righteousness, but by service to God and man.

The people who settled in this country in the first instance were the picked Christian men and women of the civilized world. They constituted the sturdy stuff out of which the noblest type of Christian citizenship and the most heroic type of Christian manhood and womanhood are made. Many motives prompted the coming of the colonists to this country, but it can easily be shown that the greatest of them all was religion, the desire for religious and civil freedom to make possible the highest development of moral character and personality in themselves and their children.

In the first settlement made by the English in North America in 1606 (that in Virginia) the charter of the new colony gave special emphasis to the large place which the Christian religion was to have in the life of the new colony. The charter declared of the colony at Jamestown that it was designed that "under the providence of God it might tend to the glory of his Divine Majesty in propagating the Christian religion to such people as yet live in darkness and miserable ignorance of the true knowledge and worship of God." The first building erected by the young colony in Virginia was a house for Christian worship. The "Mayflower Compact" of 1620 declared that, foremost among the objects that brought the "Pilgrim Fathers" to this country was "the glory of God and the advancement of Christian faith." The "Articles of Confederation of the New England Colonies," 1643, begin with

these words: "Whereas we all came into these parts of America with one and the same end and aim, namely, to advance the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to enjoy the liberties of the gospel in purity and peace; and whereas in our settling, by a wise providence of God, we are further dispersed upon the seacoasts and rivers than we at first intended, etc."—words which show their recognition of and dependence upon the guiding Hand of God.

The Huguenots who came to this country were the very flower of the Christian manhood and womanhood of France. Driven by persecution from their native land, they found a welcome home in the Carolinas and elsewhere in America. A country never welcomed a finer type of Christian character and heroism to its shores than that of the French Huguenot. In the face of both royal and ecclesiastical despotism, they dared to contend for freedom of conscience, freedom of worship, and freedom of speech, the three essential principles of all religious and civic liberty; and not being allowed to hold such sentiments in France, they turned to the one and only land that gave such sentiments and those who held them a hospitable welcome. Henry Cabot Lodge says that in proportion to their numbers the Huguenots have produced and given to the American republic more men of character and ability than any other class of early settlers in this country.

"The State of Georgia was colonized expressly as an asylum for imprisoned and persecuted Protestants." So writes Dr. Baird, the Church historian. "No colony of all the thirteen had a more distinctly Christian origin than this. Godly Moravians from Germany, devout Churchmen and pious Puritans from England, brave Highlanders from Scotland, the heroic Salzburgers from the Alps—all found a cordial welcome here." The history of these Salzburger colonists Bishop Hurst refers to as "one of the most remarkable records of a patient, pure, and uncomplaining religious body in the whole history of the Christian Church."

The Scotch-Irish who settled in the upper valleys of Virginia and in the Piedmont sections of Virginia and North Carolina were the very embodiment of sturdy and conscientious Christian manhood. In the fiber of their moral

character they were made of granite, of flint, of iron. They stand to-day, and have always stood, for all that is best in our Christian civilization.

The Dutch who settled in New York were not so distinctly and avowedly religious as the other early settlers in the motives that led them to come to this country; but their dominant motives were moral and civic, and not commercial, and they had back of them a history full of moral heroism, as shown in the long struggle for civil and religious liberty that made them just such a type of sturdy, solid Christian manhood as was needed in the New World to lay the foundation for what has since become the metropolis of the nation. These Dutch settlers take pride in claiming to have built "the first free church and the first free school in America."

Even the Roman Catholic colony, which was established by Lord Baltimore in what became the State of Maryland, became the most liberal and progressive type of Roman Catholicism which the world has ever seen. Their charter, obtained from the Protestant King of England, guaranteed perfect religious liberty, an almost unheard-of thing for Roman Catholicism to do in that day.

The contrast in character between these early settlers, between these heroic and high-minded men and women who came to these shores and created our republic, and the human riffraff that is now drifting into this "melting pot" of the Western world is painful to contemplate, and calls for the most serious consideration and the wisest possible legislation, lest we as a nation in discharging our duty to others find that instead of our lifting these immigrant hordes up, we allow them to pull the nation down with their low, Godless, un-American ideals and social vices.

However desirable Christian unity may be and however objectionable and hurtful a needless multiplication of religious denominations may be, we count it a fortunate thing that there were many different and independent types of Christian experience, character, and faith that met together here in those early days. This tended to make the resultant type of Christian civilization and government that was developed in this country singularly free from bigotry and sectarian

narrowness, and more genuinely liberal than could have been the case had all been of one type of religious faith. The fact that there are and have always been in this country many different religious denominations is not a thing to be deplored as wholly evil. The different Churches have influenced each other for good, and have tended to make each other broad and charitable, and have thus helped to create and maintain that ideal of civil and religious liberty which is the crown and glory of our republic. The growth of Christianity in this country and the contribution of American Christianity to world evangelization—neither of which has ever before been equaled in any country in any period of history—are in no small degree a resultant of the facts and conditions here referred to and are, as much as anything can be, a proof of the Hand of God in our history. But of this phase of our providential history we are not here writing in detail.

The Declaration of Independence, 1776, recognized in unmistakable terms the Divine Being and the need of the newborn nation for his blessing as they claimed for themselves the inalienable rights which they were entitled to “under the laws of Nature and Nature’s God,” such rights as all men had been “endowed with by their Creator.” It was “with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence” that they “pledged to each other their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.” In the “Articles of Confederation,” drawn up a year later, reference is made to how “it hath pleased the Great Governor of the world to incline the hearts of the Legislatures to the articles of confederation and perpetual union.” At a time like this there was but one step between what might turn out to be the highest patriotism, in one event, and the crime of treason, if it ended otherwise. “There is but one step between me and death,” said a young man once who became later Israel’s greatest king. One of these revolutionary patriots facetiously said: “Unless we all hang together, we are sure to hang separately.” But the sequel proved that God’s hand was at the helm, and that some political revolutions are providential.

The Colonial Congress, which was the highest governing body in this country from the Declaration of Independence in

1776 to the inauguration of George Washington as President in 1789, recognized repeatedly, in public utterances addressed to the people, "the government of Almighty God," "the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ," and the value of the Christian religion as the best means "for the promotion and enlargement of that kingdom which consisteth in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." This Congress (in 1782) passed a resolution that recognized the sanctity of the Holy Scriptures and their great value to the nation.

At the historic Federal Convention which met in 1787 to make a Constitution for the new government of the United States, George Washington being in the chair, the venerable Benjamin Franklin made a motion that the exercises of the Convention be opened daily with prayer, declaring as he did so, in the following memorable words, his faith in an overruling Providence:

I have lived, sir, a long time, and the longer I live the more convincing proofs I see that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it possible that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, sir, in the sacred writings, that, "except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." I firmly believe this, and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed, in this political building, no better than the builders of Babel.

If a man like Benjamin Franklin could feel and talk thus, we may be sure that there was a multitude of believers in God's Providence in that critical and constructive period in the life of the young Republic who in faith and prayer committed to the Hand Divine the ship of state which they were launching on the perilous sea of history.

While ethical ideals and spiritual forces have most to do with the making of a great nation, and with its fulfillment of a great mission, it is also true that national greatness is not independent of natural and physical conditions. Spiritual treasures are in earthen vessels, and a people, in order to be great and do great things, must have a land to live in and cultivate which is favorable to their highest and best development. And so we find that Robert Ellis Thompson in writing of the Hand of God in American history calls attention to the rare combination of physical features and conditions that are

found in the United States, and declares them to be a part and a proof of the Divine Providence that has designed and prepared America for a providential mission in the earth:

The natural resources of our three millions of square miles are such as to constitute this the most valuable division of the earth's surface possessed by any people. It contains more land capable of human cultivation, more navigable waters in its lakes and rivers, more extensive mineral deposits, and larger pastures, than does any other national area. . . . Providence seems to have kept the most valuable thing in the New World from notice, until the fit people was ready to occupy this region which now exceeds all the rest of the continent in the numbers of its population, its accumulations of wealth, its diffusion of intelligence, and its high standard of living.

#### IV. THE RELIGIOUS FAITH AND MORAL CHARACTER OF OUR PRESIDENTS.

If nations are instruments of Divine Providence, the faith and character of rulers is a matter of vital moment. Under a free democratic system of government, where the people choose from among themselves periodically their own rulers, the moral ideals of the people find expression in the type and character of the men chosen as rulers; and these leaders and representatives of the people, therefore, are in turn, in a sense, an expression of the moral character of the people whose public servants they are. This at least is here true in democracies to an extent that cannot be true where thrones are inherited and rulers are born rather than selected by the people in view of their qualities and fitness for leadership. If "like people like priest" was said of Israel, "like people like president" may be said of a democracy like America.

An examination and study of the representative rulers and chief magistrates of the American people will reveal the fact that the men selected to fill the office of President, taken as a whole, embody, in no small degree, in their private life and personal character, and also in their public and official acts, the ethical ideals of the Christian religion. No debauchery and basely immoral use of office such as has often made infamous the annals of the royal families of the world in the past has ever blackened the history of our Presidential office. We can select only a few for special study—and our highest and greatest these will be, but in moral character and fidelity



to duty no better than others. If a Divine Hand guides a nation, it must be upon the rulers who determine and shape its policies.

George Washington, our first President, was a devout and consistent member of the Protestant Episcopal Church. In his first official utterance as President appears the following declaration of his faith in an overruling Providence:

It would be peculiarly improper to omit, in this first official act, my fervent supplication to that Almighty Being who rules over the universe, who presides in the councils of nations, and whose providential aid can supply every human defect that his benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the people of the United States, a government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes, and may enable every instrument employed in its administration to execute with success the functions allotted to his charge. In tendering this homage to the great Author of every public and private good, I assure myself that it expresses your sentiments not less than my own, and those of our fellow-citizens at large not less than our own. No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of men more than the people of the United States. Every step by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency.

After eight years at the head of our national government Washington retired, and in doing so delivered a farewell address that has been pronounced one of the most masterful State papers ever written by any ruler. It contains words no less significant of the estimate which he placed upon religion than the above words uttered at the beginning of his presidency:

Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked: Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

These are golden words. Could a Christian nation ask from its first, most honored, and most representative ruler a better

declaration than this of faith in Divine Providence and in religion as the foundation of national morality and greatness?

"In fortitude, justice, and equanimity," says Walter Savage Landor, "no man ever excelled George Washington. No exemplar has been recommended to our gratitude, love, and veneration, by the most impartial historian, or the most encomiastic biographer, in whom so many and so great virtues, public and private, were united."

Thomas Jefferson is frequently referred to as a skeptic in religious opinions. But one of his most recent biographers says in an introduction to a late reprint of what is known as "the Thomas Jefferson Bible" that this impression is altogether erroneous. This "Jefferson Bible" is the best possible proof that could be given of Jefferson's profound reverence for Christ. He titled it "The life and morals of Jesus of Nazareth extracted textually from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John." He prepared it in French, Greek, and Latin as well as in English. This biographer says of him:

Thomas Jefferson was from early life a close student of the Bible. It was of the Bible that he wrote: "There never was a more pure or sublime system of morality than is to be found in the four evangelists." His further interest in it is clearly shown by the original copy of the so-called "Jefferson Bible," now preserved with so much care in the National Museum at Washington, it having been purchased by the United States government as a memento of the author of the Declaration of Independence, and is now a priceless relic of that great man. It is a little leather-bound volume resembling in appearance an old account book, and on its pages may be read the life of Christ, prepared by arranging chronologically all of the verses from the four Gospels that pertain to the career of our Lord, omitting, however, "every verse or paragraph that to his mind was ambiguous or controversial, and every statement of fact that would not have been admitted as evidence in a court of justice." . . . Jefferson was an indefatigably zealous student of the Bible, and was infinitely more conversant with it than the bulk of professed Christians. The framing of the Declaration of Independence reveals a strongly religious mind. His religious belief has been questioned, and yet he was a member of the Episcopal Church in Charlottesville, Va., contributing regularly to its support and serving as a member of its vestry. He wrote of himself: "I am a Christian in the only sense Christ wished any one to be—sincerely attached to his doctrines in preference to all others."

Jefferson expressed the wish toward the close of his life that he might be remembered by posterity simply as "the author of the Declaration of Independence, of the statute in Virginia

for religious freedom, and the Father of the University of Virginia."

While Abraham Lincoln was not a member of any Church, those who knew him best in later life declare confidently that he was a true Christian. He took occasion often to declare his faith in the overruling providence of Almighty God and in the efficacy of prayer. He said once to an intimate friend: "When any Church shall inscribe over its altars as its sole qualification for membership the Saviour's condensed statement of the substance of both law and gospel, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself,' that Church will I join with all my heart and all my soul." In the Lincoln Museum at Washington is an old Bible whose well-thumbed pages show that it was much used by the owner. The owner's name is plainly written on the inside of the cover: "A. Lincoln, his own book." He was all through his life a devout student of this Book, and from it he made more quotations in his conversation and in his speeches than from any and all other sources. He came into the presidential office under the most trying conditions that ever confronted any President, and the profound sense of responsibility which he was under and which almost overwhelmed him at times drove him to realize the need of God's help and guidance and made him a man of faith and prayer. When on his way to Washington City to be inaugurated, he uttered the following impressive words:

I go to assume a task more difficult than that which has devolved upon any other man since the days of Washington. He never would have succeeded but for the aid of Divine Providence, upon which he at all times relied. I feel that I cannot succeed without the same divine blessing which sustained him, and on the same Almighty Being I place my reliance for support. And I hope you, my friends, will all pray that I may receive the divine assistance without which I cannot succeed, but with which success is certain.

A confident and zealous clergyman once remarked to Mr. Lincoln during the war: "I am sure we are going to win, because we have God on our side." "My friend," Mr. Lincoln replied, "what I want to be sure of is, that we are on God's side. That is the all-important thing for us to know." They who fought for "States' Rights" and "State Sovereignty"

may have contended for a legitimate principle of government and a worthy cause; but whosoever, in any land at any time, fights for the perpetuation of human slavery, is fighting against the sun and the stars of heaven and against the sure Providence of God. No section of the United States is more devoutly thankful than the South is to-day that God in his Providence brought slavery to an end and preserved the union intact. The whole nation, however, and not the South alone, was responsible for the institution of slavery. In the earlier days of the Republic it existed in New England and elsewhere in the North, and when the slave owners there, after due experiment, found slavery unprofitable because of rigorous climatic conditions and growing antipathy to the institution, they sold their slaves to cotton planters of the South, and the sentiment against slavery thereafter rapidly developed throughout all the nonslaveholding States. Even Peter Faneuil, the founder of the "Cradle of Liberty," after whom the historic "Faneuil Hall" of Boston, famous for its anti-slavery meetings and pronouncements, was named, was at one time a slave-trader. In the meantime it can be said—though it is no justification of the institution of slavery to say it—that among all the millions of negroes in the world those who live in America to-day, taken as a whole, enjoy more of the comforts and blessings and privileges of life than those found in any other land. If the North as well as the South is responsible for this blemish upon our history, it is also true that the people of the South to-day no less than those of the North count it providential that slavery was long ago brought to an end and rejoice in the Providence that removed this moral incubus and obstacle to progress from the body politic of our nation.

No greater misfortune ever happened to the South, in connection with the Civil War, than the death of Abraham Lincoln at the time and under the conditions in which he died. Many things that followed the war in the South would have been less odious and grievous to the Southern people if he had lived. It is doubtless true that the successful termination of the war for the abolition of slavery and his

tragic death at the end of it had the inevitable effect of making him, in the eyes both of the American nation and of the whole world, an even greater hero than he would have been adjudged to be, had he lived and served the country in a period of peace. While this is true, it is also true that it was a long time before the people of the South, especially the older generation that took part in the Civil War, could do justice to Lincoln and appreciate him for his real and true worth. But there are few Southerners left to-day who can read without sympathetic emotion and profound appreciation the tribute which was paid to him at his death by Walt Whitman in the finest poem he ever wrote:

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done;  
 The ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won;  
 The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,  
 While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:  
     But O heart! heart! heart!  
     O the bleeding drops of red,  
     Where on the deck my Captain lies,  
     Fallen, cold, and dead!

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells!  
 Rise up! for you the flag is flung, for you the bugle trills,  
 For you bouquets and ribboned wreaths, for you the shores a-crowding,  
 For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning:  
     Here Captain! dear father,  
     This arm beneath your head!  
     It is some dream that on the deck  
     You've fallen cold and dead!

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;  
 My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse, nor will:  
 The ship is anchored safe and sound, its voyage closed and done;  
 From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won!  
     Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!  
     But I with mournful tread,  
     Walk the deck my Captain lies,  
     Fallen, cold, and dead.\*

Let us hope that the Providence that turned the selling of Joseph into slavery and the four centuries of Hebrew bondage in Egypt into ultimate good for the whole world as well as for the slaves themselves, even though it was meant by men for

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evil, will in some way overrule the apprenticeship in slavery which some of the negro race have served in this country to the ultimate intellectual, moral, and social good of their entire race, not only here, but in darkest Africa and elsewhere throughout the world.

A Southern Confederate soldier-poet, writing of the battle of Gettysburg, speaks for others as well as himself when he sees the Hand of God in the final issues of that bloody battle and of the civil war, and uses these true and beautiful words:

They fell who lifted up a hand,  
And bade the sun in heaven to stand;  
    They smote and fell, who set the bars  
    Against the progress of the stars,  
And stayed the march of Mother-land.

They stood who saw the future come  
On through the fight's delirium;  
    They smote and stood, who held the hope  
    Of nations on that slippery slope,  
Amid the cheers of Christendom.

God lives! He forged the iron will  
Which grasped and held that trembling hill;  
    God lives and reigns; he built and lent  
    Those heights for Freedom's battlement,  
Where floats her flag in triumph still.

Fold up the banners, smelt the guns!  
Love rules, her mightier purpose runs.  
    The mighty Mother turns in tears  
    The record of her battle years,  
Lamenting all her fallen sons.\*

Among the State papers on file in the archives of our nation's history, there is perhaps none that could be more fittingly selected to set forth the high ethical ideal of the American people in matters of international ethics, than the message which President Grover Cleveland sent to Congress just after the forcible, and what he believed to be unwarranted, military occupation by United States soldiers of the Hawaiian Islands in 1893, which occupation Mr. Cleveland believed to be a

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\*These lines were written by William H. Thompson, who fought as a private in a Georgia regiment, and himself took part in the battle concerning which he writes.

breach of both national and international ethics. It was not a question, as he conceived it, to be settled by the political aspirations and desires and the commercial interests of the United States (both of which rendered desirable the annexation of the Islands), but it was rather, as he insisted, an occasion when a Christian nation should subordinate selfish interests to that standard of Christian ethics which ought to be the first and highest law for the regulation of a nation's dealings with another nation—and all the more so if this other nation be, as was the case in this instance, at the mercy of the larger and more powerful nation.

A few quotations from this document will suffice to justify our high estimate of it as an expression of the ethical ideals of the nation.

I suppose that right and justice should determine the path to be followed in treating this subject. If national honesty is to be disregarded and a desire for territorial extension, or dissatisfaction with a form of government not our own, ought to regulate our conduct, I have entirely misapprehended the mission and character of our Government and the behavior which the conscience of our people demands of their public servants. . . . The queen knew that she could not withstand the power of the United States, but she believed that she might safely trust to its justice. . . . It has been the boast of our Government that it seeks to do justice in all things without regard to the strength or weakness of those with whom it deals. I mistake the American people if they favor the odious doctrine that there is no such thing as international morality; that there is one law for a strong nation, and another for a weak one, and that even by indirection a strong power may with impunity despoil a weak one of its territory. . . . A substantial wrong has thus been done which a due regard for our national character as well as for the rights of the injured people requires that we should endeavor to repair. . . .

The law of nations is founded upon reason and justice, and the rules of conduct governing individual relations between citizens or subjects of a civilized state are equally applicable as between enlightened nations. The consideration that international law is without a court for its enforcement and that obedience to its commands practically depends upon good faith instead of upon the mandate of a superior tribunal only gives additional sanction to the law itself, and brands any deliberate infraction of it not merely as a wrong but as a disgrace. A man of true honor protects the unwritten word which binds his conscience more scrupulously, if possible, than he does the bond a breach of which subjects him to legal liabilities; and the United States, in aiming to maintain itself as one of the most enlightened nations, would do its citizens gross injustice if it applied to its international relations any other than a high standard of honor and morality. On that ground the United States cannot properly be put in the position of countenancing a wrong after its commission any more than in that of consenting to it in advance.

It is needless to discuss here the circumstances and conditions that brought about later the annexation of these Islands to the United States, or to explain that if any wrong was done to the dethroned queen by such annexation, it seems to have been providentially overruled for the greater good of the Hawaiian people. These facts, however, cannot detract from our recognition and appreciation of the clear and discriminating statement of our ethical ideals as a nation that is contained in this message of Mr. Cleveland.

Theodore Roosevelt found many occasions in his public career to refer to the Christian religion as the inspiration and foundation of the highest civic and national morality. Many of his public utterances could be delivered with the utmost propriety from any Christian pulpit. Take as a specimen the following, which is but one among many similar utterances which came from him, to show the high estimate which he placed upon religion in the life of a nation :

I cannot understand any American citizen who has the faintest feeling of patriotism and devotion to his country failing to appreciate the absolutely essential need of religion (using it in its broadest and deepest sense) to the welfare of this country. If it were not that in our villages and towns as they have grown up the Churches have grown in them, symbolizing the fact that there were among the foremost workers men whose work was not for the things of the body but for the things of the soul, this would not be a nation to-day; because this country would not be an abode fit for civilized men if it were not true that we put our material civilization, our material prosperity, as the base only upon which to build the superstructure of the higher spiritual life.

A man of clean, pure life and unblemished record, of unusually sturdy, robust, and manly Christian character, of lofty Christian ideals for himself as a ruler and for the people over whom he ruled, he was indeed an honor to the nation.

One other honored name will be mentioned later among the presidents who have helped to make a later epoch in history providential.

#### V. OUR ETHICAL IDEALISM AND ALTRUISM.

Only that nation can consistently claim that an overruling Providence directed its origin, and that the Hand of God has been constantly manifest in its history, which continually



brings forth deeds worthy of such a high claim. What deeds, now, can America appeal to in proof of the truth of her claim that she had a providential origin, and has had a providential history, and has a truly providential mission in the world? Surely such deeds only as bear the marks of a high standard of Christian ethics, and will bear the further and harder test of sincere and unquestioned altruism, can be named as worthy fruits of a tree that claims, like the vine from Egypt transplanted in Canaan, to have been planted by a Hand Divine. The noblest deeds both of men and of nations are often done in quietness and obscurity, unnoticed in the ordinary round of life's incessant duties, the actors themselves being unconscious of anything save the conscientious discharge of duty. And this is none the less true because it is customary to cite (as we shall do) only such deeds as are conspicuous and well-known instances and examples of high ethics and genuine altruism.

The spirit of America, of the real and true and ideal America, is best described by four words: faith, freedom, ethics, altruism—(1) faith that shows itself in recognizing and reverencing God's Providence; (2) freedom, both civil and religious, that never turns liberty to do good into license to do evil; (3) the ethical ideals of Christ the standard of conduct and character, not only for individuals, but for the nation as well, and (4) altruism that is made manifest in disinterested service for others. Altruism—using knowledge to help the ignorant, power to help the weak, wealth to help the poor, health to help the sick, and virtue to help the sinful—is a law of life, obligatory not more upon the individual than it is upon the nation; and in these righteous scales Jehovah weighs nations as well as individuals. By these ethical standards let us judge our nation in the past, and determine our duty for the future. That much in our past history falls far short of this ethical ideal must be confessed. And yet this has been, and is, and must in the future be, our ideal—even though it be, as ideals always are, something that moves above and ahead, up to which the nation looks and toward which it ever moves as its goal.

Three notable episodes in our history may be referred to as peculiarly expressive of the real and true spirit of America, and as instances of our fully measuring up to the high ethical and altruistic ideal of the nation.

The motives that led the American people into the Spanish-American War were in the highest degree ethical and altruistic. Judged by the incidents and events of that war—the unbroken series of victories on one side, and of defeats on the other—no war in biblical history, no war in all history, ever furnished more conspicuous evidence that Providence wrought for one nation and against the other, than was everywhere and all the time evident in this war. Evidence was never wanting that the Lord who loveth truth and righteousness, and the freedom which they alone can give, made his Providence to favor the nation that fought unselfishly for the rights of a downtrodden and unjustly oppressed people. But perhaps the finest exhibition of ethics and altruism that was furnished by that war, came when it was over, and the victorious nation had the conquered nation at its mercy. Did any nation ever do a finer, a more generous and magnanimous thing than to treat a conquered and prostrate nation as the United States treated Spain and her captive soldiers at the end of that war? It was then that America gave Spain and the world such an exhibition of genuine and generous altruism as no nation had ever furnished before, while, at the same time, it gave to Cuba her independence and the pledge of whatever financial and other help might be necessary for her national upbuilding. And this was done under conditions and circumstances that would have probably led any other conquering nation in the world to make this war the occasion for annexing Cuba to the United States, a thing which self-interest rendered most desirable but which the ethical and altruistic ideals of the American people prevented us from doing.

Another deed worthy of a nation with a high moral ideal was furnished in the Chinese Boxer war, when the verdict of the foreign nations whose financial and other rights it was claimed had been invaded by the rebellious Boxers and not properly protected by the Chinese government, assessed enormous and, what many outsiders regarded as outrageously unjust,

indemnities against China—and this was done in spite of America's insistent and unyielding protest. Then again came an opportunity, not indeed for magnanimity and generosity, but rather for simple ethics and justice on the part of America. Out of the millions awarded our government by the foreign Powers that exercised jurisdiction in the case, our government paid reasonable compensation for damages done to Americans and their property, and then returned to China in a lump sum well-nigh all the millions that had been awarded to us—and in so acting America stood absolutely alone among the nations involved. Such unselfishness had its rich moral reward in the gratitude that was felt by the Chinese people for a deed so out of keeping with prevailing diplomatic national custom and so in keeping with America's high standard of international ethics. It is not a matter for surprise that, following that memorable episode in our relations with the Chinese government, the hearts of the people of China should have become peculiarly open to Christian missionaries and teachers from America as well as to the representatives of our civil government. The money returned to them was used in a manner most agreeable both to China and to America, to educate a select number of Chinese young men and young women in American colleges and universities, all of whom in returning to their homeland have borne back with them not only the good will of America, but the Christian ethical ideals of our people.

But during the century and a half that has elapsed since our nation began its career, there has been no epoch and no event in our history, and indeed in the history of the world, so momentous, and so demanding the exercise of high ethics and generous altruism on the part of men and nations, as the quadrennium embraced in the late world war (1914-1918) into which the voice of Divine Providence and a suffering world called our nation by many infallible signs and tokens. From the Declaration of Independence to the present time there has never been such an arousing of the moral consciousness of the American people, such a clear vision of simple, stern, inescapable duty, such singleness of aim and unity of action, such genuine altruism and self-forgetfulness, such a

spirit of self-sacrifice, such enthusiasm for humanity, as characterized the people of the United States when in 1917, following what they believed to be the leadings of Divine Providence, they entered the world war and flung themselves with self-effacing abandon into the fight for human freedom—for the freedom of all nations and all men in all nations.

It may be that our nation should have heard and responded to the call of God and humanity sooner than it did. It may be that many of our people ignobly commercialized their patriotism and fought more to gain gold for themselves than to secure life and liberty for others. It may be that the demoralization and surging waves of selfishness and commercialism and lawlessness which have followed the war and engulfed our own and other nations, have made it hard to maintain that a really high and unselfish altruism ever did actuate us in entering the war. It may be that our people have had occasion to hang their heads in shame over what our nation has failed to do since the war ended. All this may be true. But no man can be true to the American people and to the facts of history, and say that our people were not as a whole actuated by the loftiest and most altruistic of motives when in 1917, with their hearts beating as the heart of one, they went into that awful struggle across the sea, believing that it was no less a part of their providential mission as a nation to make this fight for humanity their own than was the fight for their independence in 1776, or for the preservation of the Union and the abolition of slavery in 1862. Dr. Henry Churchill King has shown that not only all true Americans but many representatives of other nations also were quick to recognize and declare the truth and justice of these statements concerning America's altruism in this war:

There is no mistaking the rare and lofty idealism with which America entered this war. America made her decision to enter the war on high ethical and essentially Christian grounds. Not for territorial or commercial gains; objuring all idea of later indemnities; practically unmoved, it must be stated, by thoughts even of self-defense; after every righteous effort to preserve peaceful relations with Germany had been exhausted; when the greatness of the issues had become plain; in the face of fixed American traditions; in marvelously unified fashion; and across three thousand miles of sea—America threw her whole self, with every resource, into this struggle, for the sake of righteousness, of humanity, of civilization. It was a singularly im-

pressive moral movement. No wonder that the distinguished *littérateur*, Hughes de Roux, voiced his conviction by declaring that "history had never before seen a great nation moved to war by so completely unselfish and idealistic motives;" nor that Mr. Balfour should describe the entry of the United States into the war as "the most magnificent and generous act in all history." "And they came," said Henry Bergson, the noted French philosopher, "with no designing aim, stirred neither by selfish interest nor by fear, but by a principle, by an ideal, by the thought of the mission they were called upon to fulfill in the world."

But, lest America should be exalted above measure and be filled with pride and self-esteem because of her own altruism, Providence, quickly after the war, suffered days of disillusionment and retrogression to come to the nation—days which, whether it should be so or not, have sadly discounted and discredited, in the eyes of all nations, the high claims made for ethical idealism and altruism on the part alike of our soldiers abroad and our people at home preceding and accompanying our participation in the war. But even days of disillusionment have a providential mission and teach a needed lesson that will not be learned in any other way, and that is, that lofty ethical idealism will not remain in the high air of itself, and that altruism will not remain disinterested and unselfish of itself. The same moral free will and personal power that called them into existence are necessary to keep them in existence. When the engine that took the *aéroplane* on high ceases to furnish power, engine and airplane fall to earth. When the heart ceases to send forth its currents of blood throughout the body, the heart and body die. Eternal vigilance is the price not only of liberty but of all progress; and moral progress is something which, however providential it be, is yet conditioned on human coöperation: it will not take care of itself. The keeping up of the never-ending fight necessary to hold what has been gained in moral progress, and to keep the progress perpetually progressing, is the great problem of Christian civilization in periods of peace. To win this ceaseless fight for moral progress, and keep it won, demands nothing less than a full moral equivalent of war. However justifiable a nation's entrance into a given war may be, and no matter how ethical and altruistic its motives, it must not be forgotten that moral progress is the achievement

of peace and not of war. Peace, then, and not war is the best testing period of ethics and altruism in a nation, and furnishes the best opportunity for their cultivation and exercise. The nation has been great in ethics and altruism in time of war; it should be greater still in times of peace.

It is not wise, as a rule, to attempt to interpret any man's life and work as they are related to providential history until he is dead and his work is done. But we cannot close this study of the Hand of God in our history without referring to one President who is yet living. The man who voiced the sentiments of the American people and led the nation in the late world-war crisis in our history, out of the shadows and perils of which we have not even yet passed, is destined, we believe, to take and to hold a permanent place in the front rank of those providential leaders that have made our nation morally great in the past and upon whose leadership the nation must depend in no small degree for great moral achievements in the future. Woodrow Wilson seemed, in the providence of God, to have "come to the kingdom for a time like this," and coming years will not diminish but deepen the world's appreciation of the great service he rendered our own and other nations at this moral crisis in the history of nations. Many of his public utterances during the eventful years of 1914-1919, when he was the moral leader and spokesman not only of the American people, but of multiplied millions in other lands, are worthy to be placed, along with those of Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, and Cleveland, among the official documents and state papers which we must rely upon to prove the truth of the claim that we are here making that God has blessed us above all other nations in giving us God-fearing and divinely guided men as leaders and rulers, and that, under the leadership vouchsafed to us by Providence, our nation has been called to fill in the past, and is called yet more fully to fill in the future, an altogether unique, important, and responsible mission among the nations of the earth.

Among the many utterances of President Wilson expressing our ethical idealism as a nation we quote the following, each paragraph being taken from a different address, but all of

them characterized by a common idea that brings them into unity in setting forth the ethical ideal of the American nation :

If America stands for one thing more than for another, it is for the sovereignty of self-governing people, and her example, her assistance, and her encouragement, have thrilled two continents in this Western world with all those fine impulses which have built up human liberty on both sides of the water. She stands, therefore, as an example of independence, as an example of free institutions, and as an example of disinterested international action in the maintenance of justice.

Why is it that every nation turns to us with the instinctive feeling that if anything touches humanity it touches us? Because it knows that ever since we were born as a nation, we have undertaken to be the champions of humanity and the rights of men. Without that ideal there would be nothing that would distinguish America from her predecessors in the history of nations.

But the final test of the validity, the strength, the irresistible force of the American ideal has now come. The rest of the world must be made to realize from this time on just what America stands for; and, when that happy time comes when peace shall reign again, and America shall take part in the undisturbed and unclouded counsels of the world, it will be realized that the promises of the fathers, and the ideals of the men who thought nothing of their lives in comparison with their ideals, will have been vindicated, and the world will say: "America promised to hold this light of liberty and right up for the guidance of our feet, and behold she has redeemed her promise. Her men, her leaders, her rank and file, are pure of heart; they have purged their hearts of selfish ambition, and they have said to all mankind: Men and brethren, let us live together in righteousness and in the peace which springeth only from the soil of righteousness itself."

And my dream is this: that as the years go on and the world knows more and more of America, it will also drink at these fountains of youth and renewal, that it will also turn to America for those moral inspirations that lie at the base of human freedom, that no nation will ever fear America unless it finds itself engaged in some enterprise inconsistent with the rights of humanity, and that America will come into the full light of that day when all shall know that she puts human rights above all other rights, and that her flag is the flag not only of America but the flag of humanity.

The final results accomplished by the recent "Disarmament Conference" held at the invitation of our Government in the city of Washington are not yet ready for appraisal, but are even now sufficiently apparent to justify us in feeling that the leadership of our nation in bringing about and promoting the work of this conference are in keeping with our traditional record, ethical and altruistic, which commits us to using our influence and best offices for promoting peace among all nations. But America, if she be true to the ethical ideals of the

past, will not be content to stop with this effort for world peace.

“The Master is come, and calleth for thee,” are words that may be as fittingly addressed to a nation to-day as they were to the young woman of Bethany in the lifetime of our Lord; and the things to which He calls cannot be misunderstood by any one that hears his voice. It is to altruistic service, not to isolation and self-centeredness, that God calls the America of his Providence. This great nation, the helm of whose history his Hand has guided in the past, cannot be true to its divine call in this new day of world needs and world opportunities, if it closes its ears to the cry of the nations and its eyes to the vision of their needs. If famine, or pestilence, or flood, or earthquake, or any other disaster has befallen the people of any land at any time, the American government and people have never failed to do the ethical, altruistic, and generous thing as needed. The gift of money and of men and women for helpful and sacrificial service, whenever and wherever needed, has always answered without delay the call of humanity—and this to such an extent that America has become the synonym among all nations for generosity and helpfulness. This is as it should be; and this is the best proof of the presence of God’s Hand in our history. Nor should the commercialism and profiteering of money-loving and money-making men in our country be allowed to blind any man’s eyes to the recognition of the splendid altruism that belongs, and has always belonged, to our people. Nowhere else in all the world have so many men and women of great wealth turned their accumulated millions into the service of humanity at home and abroad, as here in America. Whenever anything is to be done in the world, two things are necessary, money and men. Money is needed and much of it, and needed for everything; and this means that it is the duty and providential mission of some men and some nations to make it, to make it that it may be used for the service of humanity. The commercialism whose accumulated coin is turned into currency for the service of mankind is in its ultimate aim ethical and altruistic. If America controls the wealth of the world, and is herself ruled by gold, it is the providential mission of her ethical



idealism and altruism to turn this rule of gold into the golden rule.

A great nation has never perhaps in the history of the world had so great an opportunity, by virtue of its unprecedented possession both of wealth and of moral influence, to practice with generous altruism the golden rule and the law of love toward unfortunate and suffering sister nations as has the American nation to-day. Not only is it true that "man's extremity is God's opportunity," but it is also true that the world's extremity is a Christian nation's great opportunity to serve mankind and bless the world by giving practical proof that the golden rule and the law of love can be practiced by nations as truly as by individuals. It was in the darkest days of Hebrew history that prophetic optimism and universalism burst into glorious song, inspired by the vision of the coming Messiah; and in and through the Hebrew nation the Messiah came in spite of the wreck and ruin of empires that seemed for the time to make vain all hope and promise of his coming. Happy would we be if America might become the servant of Jehovah in this our day through whom the Messiah's golden rule and law of love should be made real in the world. It was with America's opportunity for this Messianic service in mind that the following lines were written:

Whene'er with faith we dare to hold  
That golden rule, not rule of gold,  
Shall be for men and nations, too,  
The rule of life the whole world through;

When rich and poor alike shall see  
From golden rule no man is free;  
When greed of gold and jealous hate,  
O'ercome by love, and shame, abate;

When we dare seek with all our heart  
To serve all men, and do our part  
Through love that shares in generous deed,  
And joys to meet another's need;

Then earth will see the day at hand  
When all true souls in every land  
In league of love for right shall stand;

When all one golden rule shall own,  
 And love on earth shall claim the throne,  
 And Love in heaven as God be known.

For faith can never know defeat  
 That has in power of love its seat.\*

## VI. WHAT MAKES A NATION GREAT?

What, then, shall we say, in view of these facts, is the vocation of the American nation? What is the task which Providence has assigned to us as a people, discharging which we will fill our place among those favored nations who are "the called according to God's purpose"—called to serve, not themselves only, but others also, and perchance all mankind? We answer our own question in language partly furnished by one of our own great Presidents: It is our mission to maintain in the world that form of government which is best adapted to promoting the highest good of all its citizens, intellectually, morally, and socially; to lift needless and unnatural burdens from all shoulders; to clear the paths of all worthy and laudable pursuits and throw them open to all who are prepared to enter them, and to afford all an unfettered start, and as far as government can make it so, a fair and equal chance to achieve success in the race of life. And then, having done this for its own people—indeed, while doing this for its own people—to use its moral influence and material power to secure similar conditions and advantages for all other peoples without regard to race or residence.

The final proof of the Hand of God in a nation's history then is not found, if this answer be true, in its unequalled wealth, or its commercial supremacy, or political prestige or military power, but in the moral metal of its manhood and the moral worth of its womanhood—in the goodness and greatness of its people. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"—knowledge, truth, freedom, personality—these are the things provided by Providence to make individuals and nations great. And when this greatness has been attained, "he that is greatest among you shall be the servan

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\**Nashville Christian Advocate*, November 28, 1919.

of all"—this is the test and proof of greatness in the eyes of God for nations as well as for individuals. Knowledge and culture, ethics and character, service and altruism, personality and power—these are the credentials furnished by God to men and nations who, submitting to his providential guidance, seek for honor and glory and immortality. The American sage who furnished the words with which we began our study of God's Hand in our history at its beginning, has no less happily described for us the providential aim and end of that history in a little poem titled "The Nation's Strength," which needs often to be quoted that it may alike warn us of our danger and inspire us to seek for national greatness and glory where alone it is to be found:

What builds a nation's pillars high  
 And its foundations strong?  
 What makes it mighty to defy  
 The foes that round it throng?

It is not gold. Its kingdoms grand  
 Go down in battle's shock;  
 Its shafts are laid on sinking sand,  
 Not on abiding rock.

Is it the sword? Ask the red dust  
 Of empires passed away;  
 The blood has turned their stones to rust,  
 Their glory to decay.

And is it pride? Ah, that bright crown  
 Has seemed to nations sweet;  
 But God has struck its luster down  
 In ashes at his feet.

Not gold, but only men can make  
 A people great and strong,  
 Men who for truth and honor's sake  
 Stand fast and suffer long.

Brave men who work while others sleep,  
 Who dare while others fly—  
 They build a nation's pillars deep  
 And lift them to the sky.\*





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